



**Hansard Association of Canada  
25th Annual Conference**

**August 26–29, 1998  
Victoria, British Columbia**



**25<sup>e</sup> Conférence annuelle  
L'Association canadienne des éditeurs  
des journaux des débats (Hansard)**

**26 au 29 août 1998  
Victoria, Colombie-britannique**

HANSARD ASSOCIATION OF CANADA  
25TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE

August 26 to 29, 1998  
Victoria, British Columbia

- Host:* William Hartley, MLA, Deputy Speaker (for Hon. Gretchen Mann Brewin, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly)
- President:* \* Richard Copeland (Ontario)
- Secretary-Treasurer:* \* Gary Garrison (Alberta)
- Convener:* \* Peter Robbins (British Columbia)
- Delegates:* Kit Anderson-Knight (Ontario)  
\* Edith Bousquet (Manitoba)  
Alison Braid-Skolski (British Columbia)  
\* Judy Brennan (Saskatchewan)  
Heather Bright (British Columbia)  
\* Rodney Caley (Nova Scotia)  
Estelita Chan (Ontario)  
Ian Church (United Kingdom)  
\* Tony Dambrauskas (House of Commons)  
\* Linda Fahey (New Brunswick)  
Keith Gordon (Manitoba)  
Heather Graham (British Columbia)  
Deirdre Grist (Alberta)  
Carol Holowach (Alberta)  
Karla Klane (Northwest Territories)  
Donelda Klein (Saskatchewan)  
Laura Kotler (British Columbia)  
Terry Larock (House of Commons)  
Vivian Loosemore (Alberta)  
Lou Mitchell (British Columbia)  
\* Jeanie Morrison (Senate)  
Suzanne Murphy (British Columbia)  
Brian Potvin (House of Commons)  
David Reeves (Senate)  
\* Dave Robertson (Yukon)  
Jean Speers (Manitoba)  
Lorraine Sutherland (United Kingdom)  
\* Irene Tapper (Newfoundland)  
Anne Williams (Yukon)  
\* Liz Wyman (Northwest Territories)

\* Denotes official voting delegate

*Presenters (Members):*

Edith Bousquet (Manitoba)  
Estelita Chan (Ontario)  
Richard Copeland (Ontario)  
Tony Dambrauskas (House of Commons)  
Heather Graham (British Columbia)  
Deirdre Grist (Alberta)  
Laura Kotler (British Columbia)  
Terry Larock (House of Commons)  
Rob Sutherland (British Columbia)  
Greg Whincup (British Columbia)

*Presenters (Non-Members):*

Prof. Janet Bavelas (Department of Psychology,  
University of Victoria)  
Patricia Kealy (Society of Translators and Interpreters of B.C.)  
Hamid Khoshnevis (Vice-President, Advanced Interactive Inc.)  
Karim Lakhani (Vice-President, Advanced Interactive Inc.)  
Nick Melber (Vice-President, Carousel Computers)  
Kathleen Ryan-Lloyd (Legislative Library of B.C.)  
Kenneth Ryan-Lloyd (Office of the Auditor General of B.C.)  
Gordon Wilson (MLA for Powell River-Sunshine Coast)

*Design and Layout:*

Robert Bubba (Ontario)

*Production:*

William Ross (Ontario)

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APPENDIX: Transcription as idealization

be one little glitch somewhere, an ink spot or something, that throws the whole line off. You really have to be very careful.

**J. Brennan:** Thank you very much.

In terms of automation for smaller jurisdictions, we've approached it slightly differently. We've been a Windows and Word shop since January of 1996. So it's possible to phase in these things. Our people are fully conversant with Windows and with Word, and if we had money, we'd do digital audio. But that's the next project. It's possible to do these things piecemeal. You don't need to roll it all out at once.

**The Chair:** That's a good comment. We chose that route, but there's no compelling reason other than my urgency to get the project done and then to move on to other things. We could have phased it in. It just happened that way, in many regards; all the planning aspects hit at the same time.

Thanks, everybody. I'm going to turn the chair over to Gary for the next session.

[G. Garrison in the chair.]

#### STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND TECHNOLOGY CHANGE

**The Chair:** I didn't really prepare a presentation like Richard did, so this will be an open round table for the next 35 minutes, talking about staff development, with particular reference to technological change. It was interesting to hear Richard refer to the comment of his vendor: "Gold will solve the problem." Well, gold will solve most problems, but all we have is loonies, and they're not worth very much these days — and we don't have very many of them anymore, it seems.

I just want to make a couple of quick points about our situation in Alberta. Hopefully, that will encourage other people to join in and share what their situations are like with respect to this issue. The obvious linkage between what we're going to talk about now and what Richard just led us through is that the major impact with all of us, it seems — on our staff and on our operations — has been the constant changing of our technology. Technology has always been a key element of what we do.

In Alberta — and you'll have to tell me if this is true elsewhere — we have a situation where we have another factor that's probably getting to be at least as big, and maybe bigger. That's staff turnover. The Klein government came in in '93, promising that there'd be a lot less government. Basically, we've ended up with a lot less legislature. In other words, for the last two years — last year and this year — the number of sitting days we've had has been down considerably. We've never had a very active committee system, and most of our production staff are part-time people. We have a real problem holding onto these

people. They become very valuable to us, because, of course, we invest a lot of time and effort in training them, and then we lose them. Just this last year — and I hope I'm accurate in this — we lost eight people out of an inputting staff of.... Well, that varies, too, but it's anywhere from 12 to 14. We lost well over half of our inputting staff in one year, and the prospect for the current year is that we may well see the same type of thing. We've got a fall sitting coming up in mid-November, and we really don't know at this point how we're going to cope.

Just a couple of comments about some specifics. Back to the technology issue, I'm sure that everybody here knows that our application is so specialized that it's rare that you would find a course somewhere that is really useful for what we do. We had the experience in the last few months of having a couple of people come in and do a custom course for us. The problem was that our application was so specialized that even when we worked with the trainers ahead of time, the course wasn't nearly as useful as we thought it ought to have been. Maybe Viv would like to comment some more on that one. No? This is on the record; I can see why you're hesitant.

That's basically all I wanted to say about our situation in Alberta with respect to staff development. We certainly don't have any wonderful new answers. We've got a lot of questions, and we've been muddling through. I'd invite anybody else to share any comments they have on their own experience in this area.

[9:30]

**I. Church:** A slightly different aspect to this, and an enormous problem for us, isn't so much production staff — reporters and transcribers — because we don't have difficulty recruiting and training them. Our problem is in IT staff. Nobody has mentioned the millennium problem so far this morning. Certainly it is having an enormous impact on costs in the United Kingdom — the wages, basically, of IT staff. They are, as it were, a finite resource in an infinite market. The House of Commons at Westminster basically follows civil service guidelines on pay, and we are having to try to recruit technical staff at levels of pay which are perhaps 30 or 40 percent below what is paid in the real world.

The implications of that for our IT development program are enormous, and I can give you an example. After banging my head against the wall for quite some time, I managed to get approval for three additional IT staff. Other departments in the House were attempting to do the same. It was decided that we would do a combined recruitment program. We spent £75,000 on a series of advertisements in the national press. But of course, those advertisements were offering pay that was considerably below the going rate. The result, I have to tell you, is that after several months and a great deal of time, trouble and money, we have no one. We just can't recruit. We're in the market, but we're not equipped to compete in that market.

These technical people are absolutely crucial to our operations now. This must go for everybody here. If our systems don't work, we don't work. It's not like the old days, where you had a piece of paper and a typewriter, and you could hammer it out and give it to somebody to take to the printers, who would set it. It's all on computers now, especially the more you go into it with digital audio and voice recognition and that sort of thing. What we're hoping is that there will be a realization by our Parliament that we've got to move into the real world, where these people are concerned, and compete.

**The Chair:** There's one reassuring thing. Somebody told me that after the turn of the millennium, the demand for IT staff will be a lot less. Maybe if we can hang on for another 16 months, the problem will solve itself.

**T. Larock:** You and I were discussing this subject last night, Gary. We're very fortunate in the Hansard end. Although we did raise the complement in English transcribing by 40 percent this year, because we transferred one to edit and we've lost so many people.... My French crew was up by 50 percent. Basically, when we started operating in March-April this year, we were running with over 60 percent new staff. They'll be back, though. We've never had a high turnover. It was just due to attrition — age, retirement and the packages. Where we have found an area that is hurting us is in the committees area. Although our committees have sat fairly heavily lately, we have to balance out getting mass numbers of sessionals or part-timers, because you really want them all there.... But when you do that, you've got to spread them out and give them fewer hours. The moment that happens, you kill the incentive of money.

The name of the game that we're going to target, I assume.... I'm speaking for Committees Directorate services — and I'd better watch myself here.... I think we're going to have to localize our numbers to a point and give them as many hours as we can in order to keep that loyalty to return, even if it means spending a few extra bucks in overtime, rather than spreading it out and thinking of the almighty nickel and dime. If you want to keep those people and give them some amount of money to live on.... That always becomes the pitch: the money. We're also reeling, like everybody else, from cuts. We're being asked to look to the future for succession, for filling up the ranks with new people.

That's all well and good, but somebody had better give us the money, so we are able to afford to have extra staff, to plan for the future. Right now I'm already in the hole, and I haven't got any money to plan and train for the future. That may be something else other people are facing. Technology has its points, too, but.... I don't know about the rest of you, but when I'm recruiting, I'm recruiting for knowledge of what we want in our trade. If they meet the minimums of what we're looking for, we'll train for the rest. That's mechanical. Our biggest problem is language and grammar

— in both languages. Machinery isn't my greatest problem as much as is finding qualified people. That's it, for my end.

**B. Potvin:** I just want to add something to what Terry said. We were successful in finding a bilingual transcriber this year. It is the second time this has happened in Debates, but the result has been an excellent one. She can work efficiently in both languages, and then we can use her on either side of the staff in accordance with the staff requirements of the day. It's been quite a success story. We also brought an editor in from the transcriber level, and I was assigned to train this person. Within a week, she was on full-stream. There was very little need to look at her work, and it was another success story. I forgot to mention that the bilingual transcriber was found in an old way: it was by word of mouth. Someone recommended that we try this woman, and it worked. That's all I want to say.

**The Chair:** Maybe that's how you can find your IT people, Ian.

**I. Church:** Yeah, right.

**T. Dambauskas:** Just to add to what Brian and Terry were saying, it is interesting that over the past six or eight months, I've received a few phone calls from private companies that seem to be picking up on some of our problems throughout the country. The established transcription organizations are knocking at our doors and saying: "Is there anything we can do to help?" With the problems of the number of hours available and the ability to retain staff, it might be something that we will have to start to look at, in terms of seeking outside assistance to do some of our transcription. Our ability to train quickly and retain staff and our ability to have specific person-year dollars versus just money that you could pay an agency might be something that we'll be looking at over the next year, I suspect.

I don't know if anybody else has received calls from private agencies looking for business, but it would be interesting to hear about that over the next 12 months.

**L. Wyman:** I'm one of those agencies that might be calling, Tony — thank you.

I'd like to pose certain scenarios about our staff training, qualified as to what we are going to need in the future, as opposed to what we're going to do now. I think this association can be used for lobbying in some of the educational institutions and in some of the programs that they're running, so that in two years' or five years' time, we'll be able to hire trained staff with the qualities that we're going to be looking for. I think that's part of the future that the association should be looking at.

As we saw yesterday, technology is changing fast, and the skills that we're using now in our transcribers could possibly change. What skills are we going to be looking for in five years' time? The court reporter training that we saw yesterday, with the voice-activated software out there, is not